



## MASTER FILE

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### DSSD CENSUS 2000 PROCEDURES AND OPERATIONS MEMORANDUM SERIES #G - 12

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Subject:                Observation of Block Canvassing

#### I. INTRODUCTION

I observed Block Canvassing field operations on April 29 and 30, 1999 in Hennepin and Dakota Counties, Minnesota. This is the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area. Although the listing operations in these cities were finished, there was still work being completed in the surrounding suburban areas.

#### II. OBSERVATION AND COMMENTS

The various employees I talked to from the Minneapolis Early Local Census Office (ELCO) said that in general the Census maps and address lists were of good quality. Mostly the canvassers were responsible for correcting geocoding errors, which were not extensive, and adding some housing units. It is fortunate that the Census Bureau materials were good in this region because I saw a number of errors in following protocol during my observation.

On the morning of April 29, I observed Quality Assurance (QA) performed by a Crew Leader's Assistant (CLA). This assistant had been tapped for the job after some other CLA had resigned, and thus the training this CLA received on performing QA was minimal. The primary mistake I saw was that the QA was performed from book to ground rather than from ground to book. This was true when I observed QA the next day, too. In particular, those performing the QA filled out the housing units on the QA sheet before going into the field. Therefore the addresses that appeared on the QA sheet were in book order and did not account for possible adds. When we arrived at the area that was to receive a QA recanvass, the CLA did not seem to be doing the check from ground

to book but rather looking for the addresses that were on the QA sheet. Also this CLA went up to the asterisked units to ask if there had been anybody by to check their addresses for the Census. He had added this to his QA to check that the listers were performing that part of the duty, but the revisit increases respondent burden.

After the QA I observed this CLA performing the other segment of his duties, which was as a lister, canvassing his Assignment Area (AA). Although he did a generally good job, he did not consistently canvass to the right. For some reason this did not seem to this lister to be a logical way to complete his task. The other lister I observed on April 30, also had canvassed part of his block this way. When we got to the point that only one more street in the block would need to be canvassed, based on where canvassing for this block had begun, this canvasser announced that he had already canvassed that side of the street while he was canvassing other blocks in that area. The instruction to canvass the AA in a systematic fashion seemed to override the instruction to canvass a block to the right.

The CLA I observed also had an interesting policy of double-checking all units in the Address Register that had an action code of D1, the code for a non-existent unit. On this particular day all three of the units that had received an action code of D1 were quite clearly present in the original Block Canvassing block. This was not the first time this CLA had found a unit listed erroneously as a D1.

There were also difficulties when an interview took place. The canvassers did not seem to have a good idea of why we were asking the question about rental units, and the general population understood the question they were asked even less well. If complete information were given to the canvassers, they would be more prepared for responses that ranged from information about a particular respondent's or a neighbor's living situation to a claim that this information was none of the government's business. The usual response was a defensive reply that the housing in that neighborhood was all family housing. It needs to be clear to everyone that what the Census Bureau is asking for is unlisted housing units.

There were some difficulties for the ELCO employees that need to be addressed. The unemployment in this area is among the lowest in the country and was under two percent at the time of my visit. Although there was not a large problem with getting people paid correctly in this operation, there is a major pay inequity in the region. Many of the canvassers had responded to advertisements of \$11.75 hourly pay rates. However for some the location of their house in a suburb caused them to be paid only \$9.25 an hour. There was no easily discernible reason for the inequity, and it caused a bitter feeling toward the Census Bureau by those so affected. Additionally when people hired for this operation tried to explore the possibility of working in future census operations in the area, they could not get any information from the Kansas City Regional Census Center or from any other medium. With the level of difficulty of hiring people in this location, the Bureau should be responsive to those who wish to continue their employment.

A further complication was that the office staff at this ELCO did not have access to the Internet and the Census web page. The information is important to the offices, and trips to the local library for web time were required.

As a general comment, it was never explained to anybody I met in my Block Canvassing observation why the Census Bureau maps could have streets without street names on them ( I was asked the same question during a visit to the National Processing Center). The reason is that the scale for the name label was too large for the length of street on the map, but this was not written anywhere, and it caused much confusion for anyone trying to use the Census Bureau map products. Since the listers are supposed to make annotations such as adding street names to their maps where they are missing, it is confusing when known street names do not appear on the maps.

Another point of confusion was the treatment of addresses in a cul-de-sac on the address listing page. The addresses were listed in increasing numerical order for a block segment, and the asterisks are assigned to every third unit on each block segment of the address list. For a cul-de-sac, then, the canvassing does not occur in address list order; also, the asterisked units could be right beside each other. Since the sorting of the address lists was never explained during the training for the field operation, many people performing the operation believed the Census Bureau address lists were somehow inaccurate.

A final comment on the operation is that the materials the canvasser had to use were a little cumbersome. On windy or rainy days the large notebooks were difficult to manage.

cc::

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